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THE

Immorality of Prophane
Swearing Demonstrated;

In a New METHOD:

AND

Without the Aid of REVELATION.

DEDICATED

To Modern DEISTS and CHRISTIANS.

BY

A LOVER of his COUNTRY.

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THE
IMMORALITY
OF
PROPHANE SWEARING
Demonstrated.

The design of the argument.

THE *intention* of these pages, is to shew, that *Oaths* in common conversation are *immoral*.—In this performance, no very particular notice will be taken of those idle *excrecences* of language, which regard Oaths, or expressions in the form of Oaths, made by any *other* being or thing besides a Supreme Being. When these are considered *formally*, they are oaths which express *Idolatry*: because, no being but God is the pro-

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per object of an appeal, that is to give *force* to an affirmation or denial. It is therefore idolatrous to swear *by my Lady, by the Mass, by the Heavens, by my Stars, by George*, or the like. These forms of expression are vain or impious; as they either can have *no* meaning, or a *bad* one. If they have no meaning, those who use them do abuse *Speech*, which was given to man, in order to express *reason, truth, just-sentiment!* And if they have any meaning, they are *idolatrous*, as they have the *form* of an Oath.—With these I shall have no particular or direct concern; because, if the reasoning will but convince of the *true nature* and *solemnity* of an Oath, I am opinion, men will be prevailed upon to purge their language from all filth, froth, and vanity. But if it does not convince of the solemnity of an Oath, and the unsuitness of its being taken in common conversation, I despair of any remedy
from

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from it, in the case of *petty, trifling, base* forms of swearing.

Brevity is studied in the argument, for the sake of its being the more spread in Society; or, the more universally read: for there are supposed to be but *few* common swearers, who will take much pains for their own conviction.

It has nothing of *party* in it; and so may be read without disgust, by any sort of men, who chuse to examine it.

I would also observe, as to the prosecution of the argument, that those *truths* which are generally known and acknowledged, are laid down as *first* principles, without referring to historical testimony: It being supposed, that no man of sense would require such testimony in support of this assertion, *namely*, that men in *Spain* or in *France*, have appetites and passions similar to men in *Great-Britain*.

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In a word, the argument is conducted by a train of dependent propositions ; supported and explained without any sophistry, or intention to deceive. And may be considered as giving the *reason of the Statute-law*, enacted this *Session of Parliament*, against profane Swearing.

The method in which the argument lies, is, as follows

HUMAN Society cannot subsist without *laws*.

Civil laws must have respect to men's *words*, as well as *actions*.

Laws cannot operate without a proper *executive power*.

The executive-power must have a *method of process* that will secure its authority ; and that is, by *Oath*.

The true *nature and design* of an *Oath*.

Not to be taken, but in such circumstances as will ascertain the *solemnity* of it. The

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The reason of this, is, its giving the *utmost energy* to human laws.

Oaths cannot be lawful, but when *legally demanded*; or, when some special and important *Service to others* is intended by them.

Prophane Oaths destroy the *propriety of Speech*; especially, as they convey very dishonourable notions of God!

They can add *no weight* to a man's authority, or influence.

Prophane Swearing is an impeachment of a man's *honesty*.

In proportion to the quantity of it, in any Country, may be estimated the *irregularity of the human passions* in that Country.

Prophane Oaths are *direct immoralities*, as they do manifest *injury* to others.

No *provocation* can therefore justify Prophane Swearing.

Human

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Human Society cannot subsist without laws.

HUMAN Society cannot subsist, nor its welfare be secured without *law, order, government.*—for, from mens passions becoming turbulent and outrageous, disorder and confusion would soon take place, were it not for *restraining* laws, with their sanctions and penalties. And hence it has been, that those who have shewn a *reverence of law*, as framed and enacted for public order, and utility, have been justly esteemed *good members* of civil Society; and have deserved the protection and approbation of Government.

Civil laws must have respect to mens words, as well as actions.

As civil laws have respect to the *passions* of men, and are designed to curb and restrain them; so they must take cognizance of the *manner* in which the passions express themselves.

But

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But *words*, or human speech is one way, and usually the *first* way, of expressing the passions; and by which men may in reality, *provoke* and *injure* one another, as by their actions: therefore it is that civil laws have took cognizance of mens *words*.

Laws cannot operate without a proper executive power.

Government supposeth order; what therefore hath been found necessary to preserve civil order, must be esteemed *sacred* among men. But the *execution* of law, is as necessary as the law itself; because without it, law has no manner of force or efficacy. There must then be certain persons appointed by the Legislative, or regal power to *put in execution* such laws as are enacted; which cannot be the Province of every man, or of any but of those who are thus appointed; because this would introduce the utmost confusion.

The

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The executive power must have a method of process, that will secure its Authority, and that is, by OATH.

If certain magistrates are appointed to put the Laws in execution, they must have some *rules* of judicial process: such, whereby they may examine into any complaints or grievances; in order that they may determine legally about the *demerit* of the *injurious*; and may give Sentence accordingly. In doing this, the *reason* of the law that punisheth, must appear; as well as the *Authority* of the Magistrate, who pronounceth Sentence.

But inasmuch as *Magistracy*, has not been qualified to look into the hearts of men; Civil Laws have generally provided, as a remedy of this imperfection, that appeals should be made by the Witness, in giving *judicial* testimony, to a supreme, invincible being. And have determined the strength of evidence

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evidence to lie in such appeals. This, I apprehend, gives us the proper origin and foundation of *Oaths*.

The true nature and design of an Oath.

An Oath is a *judicial* thing; designed for the use and service of civil Society, in determinations about life or property, in any disputable case, or when the laws of one's Country demand it. Or else, in giving Security to the *State*, or *civil Magistrate* of our fealty and obedience.—And it is a solemn appeal to *God*, as a competent judge of the Sincerity of him who sweareth; and supposeth the Being he sweareth by, to be the *avenger of falsehood*. So that an Oath gives a *religious aid* to human laws and good government.

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An Oath is not to be taken, but in such circumstances as shall ascertain the Solemnity of it.

In the administration of *Oaths*, all good governments have supposed, that men who swear, do believe in the *being* they swear by ; and have a *supreme reverence* of that being ; otherwise, it will have no more energy than a bare affirmation or denial. And moreover, some *particular forms* have usually been prescribed, that have been thought most suitable to preserve the *awful solemnity* of an Oath, as British-Christians, *kiss the Gospels*.

The reason of this, is, its giving the utmost energy to human laws.

An Oath is allowed, by the common consent of all ages and nations, to be *more* than a bare affirmation or denial of a thing. For tho' truth is *Sacred* when expressed in the common forms of Speech, yet there is an awfulness and solemnity given to a declaration, when

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when made in the form of a *judicial* appeal to the *great God!* considered as the judge of the heart, and openly called upon to be the avenger of falsehood.—An *Oath* is therefore a *form* of Speech that is *peculiarly* religious and sacred: which *peculiarity* appears, from its giving the utmost energy and force to human laws, in which *others* are concerned, and in some particular and very important sense.

Oaths cannot be lawful, but when legally demanded; or when some special and important Service to others is intended by them.

An *Oath* can never be fitly taken, but when legally demanded, or when the good of *others* is to be served by it: forasmuch as it would be to *prophane* and *destroy* the religion or the sacredness of an *Oath*, to swear on any other occasion. Men must not swear *in common conversation*, because there is nothing more certain than that the doing so

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implies a *want of reverence* of the being, which men swear by. But a *reverence of God*, is the only universal principle that can secure the mind of man from the force of temptation, in every possible circumstance. Nothing short of this can keep him *honest, modest and patient*, under every temptation or provocation. But inasmuch as *honesty, modesty and patience* are indispensably requisite to the peace, welfare, and good order of Society; whatever will *abate or weaken* that principle on which these virtues support, must be vitious and impious. Since therefore profane swearing implies a *want of reverence of God*, it must be an unlawful, a wicked practice, in the sense of all good governments, as well as in the reason and nature of the thing itself.

Profane

Prophane Oaths destroy the propriety of speech: especially, as they convey very dishonourable notions of God.

There is a native simplicity and purity of speech which should be preserved, and the dignity of human nature demands it. Man is made for *truth*; and he should shew that he is so, by the constant veneration he has for it, in his common conversation. He is to consider the claim that his fellow-creatures *all* have to truth, whenever he affirms or denies. So that he is not to make his common conversation to resemble the language of a *judicial-court*, where evidence is not to be allowed valid, but upon *oath*. This is manifestly to pervert the design of Speech, and to destroy its purity and simplicity; and surely has the *utmost impropriety* in it.

Besides, prophane Oaths ordinarily supply the *want of sense*; and are designed

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signed to give a *grace* to the most hateful sentiment. So that one might ask the *prophane swearer*, whether he would not be ashamed to publish his conversation from the press? whether he would not blush at his own stupidity, and abhor himself for his own impiety?

What if a man should frequently intermix in his expressions the name of *John Styles*; and swear by this name to every thing, or any thing he said? would it not be natural to ask him, *what he meant?* why he called upon *John Styles* so often to be his witness? whether *John* was such a familiar genius to him, as to be the pleasing witness of ever idle, non-sensical, impure, unjust, and vile declaration? what a notion should we have of *John Styles*? we should think him as silly and stupid a being, as he who swore by him. Just so it is with the prophane man who swears by his maker!—Oaths therefore destroy the propriety of speech

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speech, when used in common conversation, as they convey *unjust* and *dishonourable* ideas of God! which is contrary to the very design of speech.

Prophane swearing can add no weight to a man's Authority, or Influence.

It is a very *general* mistake made among men, both by sea and land, that prophane Oaths *add* to the Authority of him, who has the command over, or the direction of others. So that some have imagined *oaths* necessary in the command of *Soldiers* and *Sailors*. But this is a very false opinion, because the persons *commanded* are usually as *free* with their oaths, as those who *command*. Consequently, oaths can be no marks of Authority; since the *Officer* thus puts his language upon a *level* with the vilest of the men under him. The above imagination is therefore as wild as that of a *Carman*, or *Drayman*, who will tell you, that his horses would

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would not draw so well, if he was not to *swear at*, and *damn them*!—And indeed to suppose that Oaths and Curses are requisite to enforce authority over mankind, has much the same reason in it.—So that if men are so far debased, it must be an *irrational*, a *base* compliance in any, to affront his maker! to violate the laws of civil society! in order, to give weight to his own *credit* or *authority* among those, who are to the lowest degree *brutalized*.—Whereas, if *Superiors* would but be honest, and discover *truth* in all their words; every just resentment would be, at least, as emphatical in the ears of the hardened slave, or the greatest drudge, only by the *vigor* of the cadence, or pronunciation of the voice.—And I doubt not but that there are some instances, both in the *army* and *fleet*, where the Authority, is perhaps not less, but greater, though Oaths are not in use to give force to the command. — This evidently would
be

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be necessary to *Oaths* having greater weight in the mouth of an officer than his affirmation, &c. *namely*, that none of his *common* or *private men*, under him, were allowed any imitation of him; for, whilst *Oaths* are *common*, they cannot add the *least* weight to authority.—Moreover, the sense of the civil Law, is, that prophane *Oaths* are impieties, and not fit to give any force to human authority; because the *Magistrate* is esteemed much *more* criminal than the common people, if he swears prophanely. *Oaths* therefore in the sense of Law, do *diminish*, but can add no weight to personal authority.

Prophane swearing is an impeachment of a man's honesty.

No possible reason can be assigned for the use of an *Oath* by any man, in common conversation, if he knows that he has a just claim to *credit* without it. But swearing is an explicate acknowledgment, that his bare affirma-

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tion or denial was thought by him insufficient; he durst not venture the force of his language without swearing; his affirmation or denial had lost its claim to credit. This is the most natural interpretation of an Oath in common speech. But if the man's word is not to be relied upon, an *Oath* will not give him any more credit: *On the contrary*, it must greatly *lessen* the reputation of his integrity; as it demonstrates his *want of piety*: for no man's *honesty* can be relied upon, who shews an *open irreverence* of his Maker;—so that a want of piety, or swearing prophanely, is an impeachment of a man's *honesty*. And this argument will support itself on the reason of the thing; for if a man should plead that he has an abhorrence of doing any wrong, in his dealings, to any man; yet, if he himself was continually *cheating the King of his Customs*, he would forfeit his claim to the character of an honest man: much more is *he* unworthy the character,

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rafter, who renders not what is due to his Maker. It follows, by a parity of reason, that a man, whose conscience will suffer him to take *unlawful freedoms* with that being, whom he owns as his *creator*; will have nothing, as a principle, that can hinder his making very *free* with the rights and claims of his fellow-creatures; *i. e.* when he can do it without observance, and with security to his reputation. This is but to conclude from the *greater* to the *less*; which is allowed to be *good* reasoning in all kinds of moral argument.—And before any man pretends to claim the character of an *honest man*, though he swears prophanely; let him acquit himself of all *unjust freedoms* with men, in *speech* as well as *actions*.—Is there not too much truth in the observation, *that he who swears prophanely, will lie also*? And a liar cannot possibly be an honest man.

In proportion, then, to the quantity of prophane swearing, in any Country, may be estimated the irregularity of the human passions in that Country.

From the premises, *Oaths* are proved to be unlawful and impious, when used in common conversation. They must then be expressive of *irregularity* in the human passions: because Speech is the *index* of the heart, or mind of man. If therefore there be an irregularity in Speech, the heart, the seat of the passions must be irregular. Oaths therefore, in ordinary discourse, will discover either the *pride*, the *vanity*, the *anger* and *rage*, or the *fury* of some other passion. And what can be thought of the man who makes God his *equal*, his *familiar*, by bringing him in as a witness to his *lust*, his *anger*, his *folly*? when if he had any just notions of God, he would be convinced,
that

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that he abhors and will punish him for all those *vile* things he calls upon him to witness. And this *ignorance* of God, will imply an ignorance of himself; and be an undeniable evidence of his neglect of his own Spirit: and consequently, of the *irregularity* of his passions. It will therefore follow, by a fair deduction, that the *quantity* of moral evil of one kind or another, or the quantity of irregularity in the human passions, may be estimated by the quantity of prophane swearing in any country; for tho' every man who prophanely swears, is not *equally* vitious, or *universally* so; yet the irregularity of his passions, in some sort, will bear a proportion.

Prophane Oaths are direct Immoralities, as they do manifest Injury to others.

He who swears in common conversation, *breaks the peace of our Sovereign Lord the King*; by disturbing the
quiet

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quiet, and by ruffling the Spirits of his Fellow-Subjects ; even of *all* such, who have a reverence of God's Name, and *dare not take it in vain*. But no man, however *exalted* his station, has a right to rob another of his peace and quiet, any more than he has a right to invade his *Property* of any other kind. It will not be of any avail, that the *prophane Swearer* should plead, that he delivers his Oaths without the least uneasy emotion.— And that he has no intention to break the peace, or do hurt to any ; for it is certain, that he is guilty ;——ay, and will be so, as long as there are Men found in Society, who are rational, who follow Nature, who are modest, who have good Sense, or who understand the *first* relation they have to God.—The prophane Swearer will therefore be chargeable with *vile, immoral* Conduct, as he wantonly commits an *outrage* on the peace of his Neighbour ; filling his Mind with horror !

horror! throwing him into a tremor! And this the modest, pious Person cannot any ways help, whilst he retains a reverence of his Maker. It will therefore be necessary, that the *prophane Swearer* be first well assured, that no one, in his hearing, will be offended at him, *before* he ventures to pour out his Oaths.——If he does not take this Care, he is guilty of *breaking the peace of his Sovereign*, by an assault committed upon the minds and bodily constitution of others. Let any one, who understands human nature, consider how the animal frame may be, and frequently is impressed by any thing that presents the mind with an horrible Idea! and he must confess that this will be the effect of swearing prophanely, upon great numbers;——consequently, it is a direct Immorality in any to swear prophanely.

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No provocation can therefore vindicate or justify prophane Swearing.

If an Oath be used in conversation to give *spirit* and *vigor* to a resentment, it is impious and immoral ; because it will then imply fury and vengeance : But in the sense of all good Governments, no man is to be his *own avenger*.—He must make his Complaints known, if injur'd, by an appeal to the *Laws* of his Country. And if the provocations are such, that those Laws do not take cognizance of them, he must break their force, by sincerely asking his Maker to *forgive* the offender. And upon this foundation *only* can his appeal lie to the God of Heaven ! who will avenge the Injuries done him upon the obstinate offender. But, by no means, must any man dare to appeal to God, to direct his Vengeance, even on his enemy ; since all Men were design'd for *happiness* as well as himself :

himself : and therefore no Oath must ever be used, in common conversation, upon any provocation, to give *Vigor* and *Force* to human Resentment of any injury that is done us. This is the voice of Reason ; this is the voice of the God of Nature. So that a *Reformation* of this Vice, of prophane swearing, will contribute much to the honour and prosperity of *Britons*.

Thus have I demonstrated the Immorality of *prophane Oaths* ; and have done it, in a *Manner* and *Method*, which, it is hoped, cannot offend the Taste of the most delicate : and yet the unpolite, the *religious*, may have the satisfaction of seeing their Conduct vindicated, without any artillery borrowed from *Revelation*.

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...and therefore no one should
...in common objects
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